

04/22/2014

Honorable United States Senator Dianne Feinstein
331 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Honorable Representative John Garamendi
2438 Rayburn HOB
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Feinstein and Representative Garamendi,

On behalf of Clarksburg's Holland Doshi Kai, I am writing in support of pending federal legislation 5.228 (Feinstein) and H.R. 1004 (Garamendi)- The Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta National Heritage Area Establishment Act. This legislation would designate the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta as the first National Heritage Area (NHA) in the State of California.

The Holland Doshi Kai is a member organization of past and present Japanese-American Delta residents who once used Clarksburg's Japanese Language School-the Holland Union Gakuen. Today, it's membership extends to include non-Japanese-Americans who support the fellowship and ideals of the organization. First-generation Japanese immigrants, or the Issei, began arriving in the Delta in the 1890's, joining Chinese immigrants in reclamation, and then as agricultural laborers and, later as tenant farmers. My great-grandfather was among the early settlers coming to Clarksburg in the late 1890's. The Gakuen was developed in 1927 as a school for Delta Japanese-American youth to learn Japanese language and culture. It was an important community center for culture, entertainment and social gatherings such as silent movies screenings, annual picnics and New Year's parties. During World War II, all individuals of Japanese descent were incarcerated by government proclamation. Those residing in this South Eastern sector of Yolo County were sent to relocation centers in either Tule Lake, CA or Gila, AZ. at which point the site was no longer used. At war's end, many Japanese-Americans and their families chose to return to the Delta. The Gakuen resumed it's role as a community gathering place for several decades. At one point in it's history, the building had served as the precinct voting center for local, state and national elections. Today, it remains one of few pre-World War II Japanese language schools still intact in California.

The Gakuen has remained vacant in recent times. It's owner is now interested in donating the site to a long-term steward. We applaud the Delta Protection Commission's initiative to help develop a sustainable plan for preservation and reuse of the Gakuen. The Commission recently acquired grant funding to conduct a charette for the Gakuen. This event will bring local stakeholders together with technical experts to develop a vision for the site's future. The Commission has been working closely with Preserving California's Japantowns and other partner organizations to encourage local stakeholder participation in this event. A DPC representative spoke at our recent annual luncheon to invite members to participate.

DPC staff also, presented facts about the Delta NHA and the concept of an Asian Pacific Islander Heritage Corridor in the Delta. This could create a thematic tour route in the Delta, linking the Gakuen with other sites in Courtland, Locke, Walnut Grove, Isleton and Rio Vista. As one of five themes of the Delta NHA is about immigrant contributions and experiences in the Delta, the effort has the potential to help further preserve and highlight the stories of Delta Japanese-Americans for a broader public understanding through heritage tourism and historic preservation.

Please let us know if you have questions or comments. Once again, the Holland Doshi Kai supports pending federal legislation S.228 (Feinstein) and H.R.1004 (Garamendi) to designate the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta as a National Heritage Area. Thank You.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Stephen Hiromoto", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Stephen Hiromoto

President, Holland Doshi Kai